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# The Bible in the Sunday School.

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## THE REAL PURPOSE OF SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK AND ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT.

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I. The real purpose of Sunday school work is *objectively* to secure a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures as the highest Revelation of God, and, *subjectively*, to secure the spiritual culture and power which come from contact with that Revelation.

II. The chief obstacle to securing a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures is a vicious method of study. The chief defects in prevalent methods are these: (a) Lack of *continuity*; the Scripture is studied in isolated fragments. (b) Lack of *adaptation*, little attempt is made to select and adjust subject matter with reference to age and mental development. (c) Lack of *unity*; the *plan* of study has no beginning and no end; there is no definite goal, and no organization of work with reference to it.

The chief obstacle to securing spiritual culture and power is the unconsecrated teacher. The teacher alone can make the Revelation *living* and *real*, can transmute the dry letter of the word so as to furnish food for the soul and give impulse to the life.

III. The ideal system will, of course, correct the defects above noted by substituting for the existing system, or lack of system, a well-matured curriculum of biblical study involving the true principles of continuity, adaptation and unity. This will give *reality* to Sunday school study. The prevailing system is so superficial, so hollow, that it involves a kind of false pretense, a kind of dishonesty, and misses altogether the mighty incentive which springs from solid *progressive* acquisition.

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The purpose of the Bible school should be to acquaint its members with the Bible, and to lead them to Christ—the first in order to the second. It is of utmost importance that the Bible should be *studied*, and not used as a reservoir of texts for sermonettes. We most honor the Word when we rely upon the Holy Spirit to use the truth in the Word, instead of our words about it.

The difficulties are in teachers who are ill-informed about what they try to teach, in scholars who have wrong conceptions of the Word and its study,

and in the reluctance of both teachers and scholars to undertake any scheme that requires real study. Fifteen years of close observation have convinced me that the so-called study now done amounts to almost nothing. Our schools have become so used to relying on "helps" that personal effort to do honest work is at the minimum. Nearly every pastor knows this. Excuse it as we may, the fact is there.

The defects of the present prevailing method are indicated in the difficulties noted above. It is a mistake to call it a "system." It is the severest indictment of that "system," that, after twenty years of use, it has produced such teachers and students as we now have. By its fruits it is known. The rank and file of those who have been nourished on it are so deficient on the very matters that they have been supposed to "study" that, with them, ministers can take nothing for granted, but must ever deal with beginnings. It is so tightly tied to the the homiletic idea, and there is room for so little else, that what it has imparted is fragmentary, destitute of perspective, and valueless, almost, as to method. The enthusiasm it is supposed to have created is mainly with those who have prepared the "helps," and the faithful few who would try to do genuine study under any plan.

The ideal system will be in value, educational; in method, historical; in process, inductive; with reference to the pupil, adapted to his attainment both in material and method; in scope, comprehensive; as to thoroughness, outline at first as the preparation for future minute study; in all things, as far as possible, abreast of the best that pedagogics can suggest.

One great difficulty in the way of using any new system, as I have found in the effort to introduce one, is the proneness of teachers and scholars to treat the new according to the irrational methods of the old. The African, accustomed to carry mud on his head for building his house, will put a wheelbarrow of material in the same place when he first handles it.

I feel sure that if we studied the Bible literature as we do the purely human, the glory of *the* book would be at once discovered, its power felt, its help experienced, and the large number of those between ages of fourteen and twenty years, whom we now find it so difficult to hold, would be interested to a degree hitherto unknown. May God speed the day.

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